

In the Classroom

Kathy Hargrove, Ph.D.

“Each one, reach one.”

“Mender of Old Baskets” was his nickname when he worked in the Congo. The tribesmen gave him this nickname because of his ability to teach the “old dogs” of the tribe new tricks. Just as an old, leaky basket can be mended to carry grain, old minds can be taught new ideas. Frank Laubach, the “Mender of Old Baskets,” made his life’s work teaching adults to read.

Laubach himself was a gifted individual. He was educated at Princeton, Columbia, and Union Seminary. An early pioneer in adult education, he developed reading charts and books designed especially for illiterate adults. His methods are credited with teaching more than 100 million people with learning to read. Of course, no one man, no matter how gifted, could accomplish that task alone. Early on, Laubach realized that a key to advancing adult literacy was to engage the newly literate in teaching their nonreading neighbors. His literacy battle cry became “Each one, teach one.”

Recently, a teacher said to me, “I know there are so many things I should be doing. My gifted students need so much. I feel torn, discouraged. The task seems too big to tackle. My students are so needy, and I don’t know how to help.” I responded with a rather trite cliché—“Take just one bite of the apple at a time”—but, I knew that didn’t really help. Her question made me wonder just how we as teachers can “tackle the big job” and better develop the talents of our gifted students.

Then, I thought of Frank Laubach. As a young teacher of Maranao Moro Muslims in the Philippines, he was troubled by the poverty and injustice that shaped the people’s lives. For him, reading was the

key. With “Each one, teach one,” he was able to be instrumental in reaching 100 million people in his 50-year professional life. Is there something teachers can do to reach even a fraction of that number? If we made a real difference in the lives of even 10 students, or maybe 20, or 100, we would be effective. Certainly, improving our curricula and instruction is one way. What we do in the confines of our classrooms counts. But, what else can we do?

In the last few years, I have known several ordinary people who have made a real difference for gifted students. One of them is a counselor in a poor rural school district. She was troubled about the potential she saw going to waste and decided to do something about it. She selected three middle school students and took them to the nearest large city to take SAT tests. All three qualified for a summer program with high entrance standards. Although none of the three had parents who graduated from high school, all three reached this goal. Two went to college. One finished college in 3 years and is now in a Ph.D. program in meteorology. That one counselor made a difference as she reached out.

Another is a mother of a gifted young woman. One of her daughter’s classmates in their average lit-

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tle school with an ordinary gifted program was an exceptional young man. He wasn't very conforming and he didn't like rules. Nevertheless, the mother thought his talent was priceless. He didn't live with his parents, and his guardian had no extra money for a special program of any kind. With the encouragement of his friend's mother, he applied for a summer camp for gifted students. She mentored him in completing the application. In spite of the fact that he was in an alternative program for most of the school year, all of his teachers recommended him highly. In fact, they decided to band together and contribute toward his spending money. Dressed all in black and with numerous body piercings, he stood out in a crowd that has always many notable and noticeable individuals. At the end of the program, he wrote, "This camp is the best thing that ever happened to me. I didn't know how exciting learning could be." That mother made a difference. She touched a student who didn't have another advocate.

Still another is a teacher in a predominantly poor Hispanic district. She heard that there were several large scholarships available for an enrichment program that was actively seeking young Hispanic women participants. The money was available, but, traditionally,

parents in the Hispanic culture are hesitant to let their daughters go away from home. The teacher went to the families and explained the opportunity. She assisted the girls in completing a long application and worked with the parents in translating information, assembling financial records, notarizing signatures, and all the other minutiae of an application. At the same time, she encouraged and reassured them that their daughters would be supervised and have a positive experience. When the girls arrived at the registration desk after an 800-mile drive, they were ready to be full participants. On closing day, their teacher came to take them home. You will not be surprised to know that she was honored at the ceremony for her dedication to her students.

Each of these three individuals "tackled the big job" by investing themselves personally in the lives of their students. If "Each one, teach one" worked for Frank Laubach, would "Each one, reach one" be an effective way to advocate for gifted students? I think so. These interventions cost little in money, but much in effort, and they made a difference in the lives of five gifted students. Perhaps many of us could do the same. [GCT](#)

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